Finance Committee

TOWN OF HALIFAX

499 Plymouth Street

Halifax, MA 02338

**Meeting Minutes**

**Monday March 8, 2021**

**Committee Members Present**: Cheryll Zarella Burke, Fred McGovern, Drew McGlincy, Tom Connolly, Joe Vetrano, Lauren Carmichael

Also, in attendance in the audience were: Charlie Seelig, Sandy Nolan, Jean Gallant, Chief Chaves and Tom Millias

The meeting was recorded by Zoom

**Fred called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:03 pm**

**Fred entertained a motion to accept the meeting minutes from 03/01/2021**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Joe

**AIF (Lauren abstained because she had not been at the meeting on 3/1/21)**

There were no Reserve Fund Transfers

Fred asked Charlie if there were any Wage and Personnel amendments to be discussed or if the Selectmen had made any recommendations. Charlie said he had nothing yet, he was still working on the Grade 6 and 7 amendment. He said there is also too much discontinuity at the top levels of the Steps in the Grade 12 and Grade 14. He said one solution would be add a Grade 16, 18 and 20 and bump up the positions like Fire and Police Chief and Town Administrator because it made no sense to have the new lieutenant position be in a higher grade then the Police Chief or the Administrator. Charlie said all those three positions are currently by contract and the Grades in Wage and Personnel are just there as fall backs in case there ever is not a contract for one of those positions. Tom Connolly said that seems like pretty standard practice in private industry. Typically, you benchmark some positions that are absolutely necessary and then you slot the other positions in line with those. Charlie said the Grades really should be based on the point system and where they land on the point system, but this is one possibility that would work for now. He said it didn’t necessarily mean you would make a change to their contractual salary just that you would move their grade. He said he would love to hear other suggestions as well. Charlie said you could always also make them ungraded positions and just associate a contractual salary with them. Tom said these ideas seemed practical for the time being. Fred said Barbara Gaynor had also sent an email regarding a Wage and Personnel issue. She was asking that her newly hired Administrative Assistant be moved from a Step 1 to a Step 3 because she had some administrative experience. He asked Charlie if the Fin Com should vote on this. Charlie said the Selectmen have not yet discussed it. Tom Connolly asked if this was a new hire. Charlie said the person is a new hire but the position already exists. Sandy asked Charlie if he had the information on what the difference between steps was. Charlie said if she was moved to a Step 3 she would make $20.43 per hour. Someone questioned how that would affect the upcoming budget. Sandy and Charlie said there was plenty of money to cover through June 30, 2021 but it might affect the FY22 budget. Sandy then clarified that if the person is moved to Step 3 of Grade 6 now and then is moved to Grade 7 in FY22 you would have to put them to Grade 7 step 2 because the bylaw calls for an increase of more then 1% when changing grades. Sandy said you would have to increase the current budget request for the Town Clerk Clerical because Barbara had not budgeted for moving the person higher. Fred asked Charlie when a decision had to be made. Charlie said probably sooner rather than later. Fred said it is hard to vote on anything that would increase the budget without knowing the new school figures. Fred asked the rest of the committee if they wanted to vote now or wait. Tom Connolly asked if this was a precursor to bringing this person on as the Assistant Town Clerk. Charlie said it could be once Barbara decides to appoint the person as Assistant Town Clerk they could act as Town Clerk at any time. Tom said he knew there were pending thoughts of retirement, so he had wondered. Fred asked if the committee felt more comfortable waiting for Wednesday and the committee decided to hold the vote until Wednesday when they would have more information after the Selectmen’s meeting on Tuesday.

Fred asked Charlie how long the Finance Committee has set aside a cushion of $300,000 from the budget in order not to tax to the levy. Charlie said it had been at least 5 years that Finance has had that as a philosophy. Fred said that he believed if the Town set a budget using all of the money including the $300,000 then it would be an automatic 1.7% increase to every tax bill. Fred asked the Committee members for their opinions on whether or not to keep the buffer. Tom said he didn’t think this year would be the year to use up the $300,000. He felt we may find ourselves in more dire straits in the future. He said he would like to see a second round of numbers on the school budget before considering something so drastic. Joe and Cheryll agreed they felt more comfortable keeping the $300,000 under the levy limit. Fred said that he then suggested we keep the $300,000 cushion and if the numbers are bad for the school or if we get out voted by the other towns then at least we have some money to work with.

**Fred entertained a motion to keep the philosophy of leaving $300,000 untaxed for FY22**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Tom

**AIF**

Fred said he wanted to discuss level funded budgets and decreases and suggested that some votes be taken by the committee on lines that met those requirements. Fred said that if the Fin Com set that as their policy for FY22 to level fund then the departments could be notified. Sandy said that if the committee looked at the new spreadsheet, she did on 3/1 then they would see the figures that would correspond with such a philosophy but also the figures for wages would include anyone who was due a step or any contractual obligations. Sandy said that spreadsheet also reflected a drop in the health insurance figures to represent only a 4% increase vs a 7% increase. Sandy said if we do all that we have a figure of $112,000 to work with but that is before we know how much it would cost to give steps to school employees.

Fred suggested to go through the budget line by line and vote to level fund lines and decreases. Tom and Joe agreed this would be the best place to start.

The following votes were taken (as printed in the 3/1/21 spreadsheet blue column):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Motion | Second | VOTE |
| 5-Selectmen Expense | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 6-Law | Cheryll | Tom | **AIF** |
| 7-Town Hall Electric | Joe | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 8-Town Meeting Warrants | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 11- Fin Com expense | Cheryll | Tom | **AIF** |
| 14- Accountant expense | Cheryll | Tom | **AIF** |
| 19- Assessor Expense | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 20-Office Machine expense | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 23-Treasurer expense | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 24-Collector expense | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 25-banking payroll expense | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 26-Tax Title expense | Cheryll | Tom | **AIF** |
| 29-Clerk expense | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
| 30-Election & Registration | Tom | Cheryll | **AIF** |
|  |  |  |  |

Fred said they would continue budget votes on 3/10/21

There was no public participation.

**Fred entertained a motion to adjourn at 6:45pm**

Motion: Cheryll

Second: Tom

**AIF**

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Cole, Secretary \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Tom Connolly, Clerk